



**Narratives Of Resistance: Political Oppression And Social Rebellion In The
Selected Fiction Of Arundhati Roy, Rohinton Mistry, Manohar
Malgonkar, And Salman Rushdie**

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Abstract

This paper examines how selected fiction by Arundhati Roy, Rohinton Mistry, Manohar Malgonkar, and Salman Rushdie represents political oppression and social rebellion across colonial, postcolonial, and contemporary South Asian history. Through comparative close reading, the study considers Roy's *The God of Small Things* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance*, Malgonkar's *The Princes* and *A Bend in the Ganges*, and Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*. It argues that these novels refuse to isolate political coercion within the formal institutions of the state. Oppression circulates through caste hierarchy, class exploitation, patriarchy, religious majoritarianism, emergency powers, militarization, censorship, and the management of public memory. Yet rebellion is equally dispersed. It appears in revolutionary nationalism and street protest, but also in forbidden love, improvised kinship, testimony, satire, bodily survival, and the recovery of histories excluded from official narratives. The four writers differ significantly in historical position and aesthetic method: Malgonkar tests the moral vocabularies of nationalism; Mistry uses social realism to document the attrition of ordinary lives; Rushdie turns historiographic metafiction and grotesque comedy against authoritarian certainty; and Roy joins lyrical fragmentation to an ethics of solidarity with stigmatized communities. Read together, their works reveal resistance as ethically necessary but politically ambiguous. Rebellion can create solidarity, yet it can also reproduce violence when it adopts the absolutism of the power it opposes. The paper concludes that contemporary Indian English fiction functions as a counter-archive in which private suffering becomes historical evidence and narrative form itself becomes a practice of democratic dissent.

Keywords: political oppression, social rebellion, Indian English fiction, Emergency, Partition, caste, resistance, counter-history

1. Introduction

Indian English fiction has repeatedly returned to the unfinished relationship between political freedom and social justice. Independence ended colonial rule, but it did not automatically dissolve caste privilege, economic exclusion, communal antagonism, patriarchal authority, or the coercive habits of the modern state. The novel became one of the most capacious forms through which writers could examine this contradiction. It could place public events beside domestic routines, show how a proclamation enters a worker's body, and recover the voices



that official histories convert into statistics or silence. In this sense, the political novel does more than reproduce historical background. It tests the moral language by which authority legitimizes itself and asks who must suffer for the nation to maintain its preferred image.

The selected authors provide a historically wide and aesthetically diverse archive. Manohar Malgonkar writes from the crises of late colonial rule, princely decline, nationalist militancy, and Partition. Salman Rushdie reimagines national history through narrators whose bodies and memories expose the instability of official truth. Rohinton Mistry concentrates on ordinary citizens, especially Parsis, Dalits, workers, widows, and migrants, whose lives are damaged by bureaucracy and authoritarian populism. Arundhati Roy connects intimate transgression to structures of caste, gender, militarization, and religious nationalism. Their fiction does not offer a single theory of rebellion; rather, it stages arguments among nonviolence, armed revolt, everyday endurance, ethical refusal, and the insurgent work of narration.

The term “contemporary” is used here in the broad literary-historical sense of post-independence Indian English writing and its continuing engagement with modern South Asian politics. The corpus crosses national and diasporic locations because the political imagination of Indian English fiction cannot be confined by residence alone. Mistry’s Canada and Rushdie’s Britain sharpen rather than erase their attention to India and Pakistan. Their distance enables retrospective critique, while Roy’s and Malgonkar’s locations produce other forms of proximity. Together the novels show that oppression is simultaneously institutional and cultural: it is imposed by police, armies, prisons, courts, party machines, landlords, caste councils, families, and inherited habits of obedience.

The paper’s principal claim is that these novels transform narrative into a counter-archive. They preserve injuries suppressed by triumphant nationalism and dramatize communities formed in the ruins of official belonging. Their resistant force lies not merely in the presence of rebellious characters but in fractured chronology, polyphony, satire, linguistic hybridity, focal shifts, and the refusal of consoling closure. Form makes the reader experience history as contested rather than complete.

2. Theoretical Framework: Power, Hegemony, and Counter-History

Foucault’s account of modern power is useful because it shifts attention from spectacular punishment to dispersed techniques of discipline. Power operates through classification, surveillance, examination, documentation, and normalization (Foucault, 1977). In the selected novels, this logic appears in prisons, police files, sterilization camps, identity checks, bureaucratic offices, and military checkpoints. The oppressed subject is not only beaten; the subject is recorded, categorized, relocated, made legible, or declared disposable. Mistry’s Emergency regime and Roy’s Kashmir demonstrate with particular force that administrative language can conceal violence behind development, security, beautification, and national integration.

Gramsci’s concept of hegemony further explains why coercion does not act alone. Dominant groups secure consent by presenting their interests as common sense and by embedding



hierarchy in institutions, customs, and language (Gramsci, 1971). The “Love Laws” in Roy’s *The God of Small Things* are powerful precisely because family, caste, religion, and police action reinforce one another. In Malgonkar, colonial authority depends partly on Indian intermediaries and on the prestige of imperial institutions. Rushdie’s dictators manufacture national myths, while Mistry’s political slogans solicit popular consent even as the state destroys vulnerable citizens.

Postcolonial theory complicates the apparently clean passage from colonial oppression to national liberation. Fanon (1963) warns that anticolonial nationalism may be captured by new elites and that violence can both decolonize and deform political community. Bhabha (1994) emphasizes ambivalence, hybridity, and mimicry, concepts that help explain identities unsettled by colonial education, migration, and competing national claims. Said (1993) locates culture within imperial relations rather than outside politics. These perspectives illuminate Malgonkar’s divided revolutionaries and Rushdie’s hybrid narrators, whose mixed languages and unstable identities resist demands for cultural purity.

Subaltern historiography asks how histories might be written from the position of groups subordinated by elite nationalism. Guha (1982) distinguishes autonomous forms of subaltern politics from narratives that make elite leadership the sole agent of change. Spivak (1988), however, cautions that the recovery of subaltern speech can itself become an act of appropriation. The novels dramatize this difficulty. They create space for Dalits, hijras, widows, laborers, minorities, and occupied populations, but they also expose the mediation involved whenever suffering becomes literature. Their strongest moments do not claim complete representation; they display broken testimony, silence, rumor, bodily marks, and conflicting memory.

3. Arundhati Roy: Caste, Intimacy, and the Politics of the Uncounted

3.1 The God of Small Things

The God of Small Things locates political oppression within the intimate architecture of family life. Set largely in Ayemenem, Kerala, the novel intertwines caste, gender, Syrian Christian respectability, communist politics, and postcolonial aspiration. The catastrophe surrounding Ammu, Velutha, Estha, and Rahel is not produced by a single villain. It emerges from a network in which family honor, caste prejudice, sexual regulation, police brutality, and party calculation converge. Roy’s phrase “Love Laws” condenses this network: affection is governed by inherited rules determining who may be loved, in what way, and with what social consequence (Roy, 1997).

Velutha’s position is especially revealing. He is an exceptionally skilled carpenter and a politically conscious worker, yet his competence does not protect him from untouchability. The family uses his labor while refusing his equality. His relationship with Ammu violates caste and patriarchal boundaries because it makes reciprocity imaginable where society permits only service. The police killing that follows is an act of state violence, but the state arrives after family and community have already translated desire into criminality. Roy



thereby refuses a narrow opposition between public oppression and private innocence. The household prepares the victim for the police.

The local communist leadership also becomes an object of critique. Comrade Pillai speaks the language of class solidarity, but he calculates Velutha's expendability within caste society. Class analysis without a sustained confrontation with caste becomes another form of abstraction. Roy does not dismiss collective politics; rather, she exposes how emancipatory rhetoric can be absorbed by hierarchy. The novel's rebellion is consequently fragile and embodied. Ammu and Velutha's love cannot overthrow the social order, yet it interrupts that order by enacting an equality it prohibits.

Roy's nonlinear narration turns memory into resistance. The reader knows early that disaster has occurred, but must return repeatedly to its fragments. Child language, repetition, capitalization, sensory detail, and temporal loops prevent the event from being sealed as a finished case. Estha's coerced testimony demonstrates how authority manufactures truth through a vulnerable body. Rahel's retrospective consciousness reopens what police and family have closed. As Tickell (2007) observes, Roy's formal experimentation is inseparable from the novel's political engagement. The "small things" are not escapes from history; they are the minute sensations and relationships through which history becomes ethically visible.

3.2 The Ministry of Utmost Happiness

Two decades later, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* expands Roy's geography from a Kerala family to a dispersed nation marked by gender exclusion, anti-Muslim violence, Kashmir, caste atrocity, and neoliberal redevelopment. Its fragmented structure gathers lives that the dominant nation treats as waste. Anjum, born Aftab, finds provisional belonging in the Khwabgah and later creates Jannat Guest House in a graveyard. The setting is politically exact: those excluded from normative citizenship construct hospitality among the dead. The graveyard becomes a counter-public where social categories are neither erased nor permitted to dictate the terms of coexistence.

The novel's rebellion is less a unified movement than a practice of assembling. Anjum, Tilo, Saddam Hussain, Miss Jebeen the Second, and others form a kinship that does not depend on blood, religious uniformity, or state recognition. This improvised community answers oppression by caring for lives that institutions abandon. Roy's narrative likewise refuses a single sovereign protagonist. It moves among documents, letters, testimonies, official idioms, jokes, and multiple perspectives, formally distributing authority across an unruly collective (Roy, 2017).

Kashmir gives the novel its most severe account of militarized sovereignty. Checkpoints, interrogations, disappearances, informers, and funerals turn civilian life into a field of permanent emergency. Musa's insurgency and Tilo's involvement place resistance under ethical pressure. The novel recognizes the historical force of revolt without romanticizing the costs of clandestine politics. Both state and insurgent structures can demand secrecy, sacrifice, and disciplined loyalty. Yet the asymmetry of power remains crucial: security



discourse normalizes extraordinary coercion and renders the occupied population suspect in advance.

Roy also connects spectacle to erasure. Development projects and media narratives make some forms of suffering hypervisible while removing their political causes. The novel counters this process through accumulation. Names, bodies, scraps of testimony, and eccentric biographies refuse the clean summary preferred by official discourse. Its apparent excess is a method: the nation's excluded cannot be represented by a single exemplary victim. Jannat, meaning paradise, is neither utopia nor retreat. It is a precarious institution built within catastrophe, embodying the possibility that rebellion may consist in sustaining plurality when the state rewards conformity.

4. Rohinton Mistry: Emergency, Bureaucracy, and Ordinary Endurance

4.1 A Fine Balance

A Fine Balance offers one of the most sustained fictional indictments of India's 1975–1977 Emergency. Mistry organizes the novel around Dina Dalal, Ishvar and Omprakash Darji, and Maneck Kohlah, whose accidental household briefly creates mutual dependence across class, caste, region, age, and religion. Against this delicate social experiment stands a political order that transforms citizens into targets of policy. Slum demolition is called beautification; forced sterilization is presented as population control; detention becomes discipline; and political rallies manufacture consent through transported crowds. Euphemism is not incidental to oppression—it is one of its instruments.

Ishvar and Om's history connects Emergency violence to caste terror. Their family's attempt to leave hereditary occupation is answered by upper-caste massacre. Migration to the city offers opportunity but not security. The tailors remain exposed to landlords, police, contractors, politicians, and arbitrary documentation. When the sterilization program mutilates them, modern developmental authoritarianism joins the older violence of caste. Mistry thus rejects the idea that modernization automatically supersedes tradition. New institutions may administer old prejudices with greater reach.

Dina's independence is similarly political. Her refusal to submit to her brother's domestic authority and her effort to earn through tailoring constitute gendered rebellion. Yet her autonomy depends on insecure housing and informal labor, both vulnerable to state and market pressure. The shared apartment becomes a miniature democratic space where persons learn to see one another beyond inherited category. Its destruction demonstrates how authoritarian power attacks not only organized opposition but also the modest material conditions that make solidarity possible.

Mistry's realism accumulates detail rather than seeking spectacular heroism. Hunger, queues, rent, sewing, train travel, bodily discomfort, and recurring humiliation disclose oppression as attrition. Morey (2004) notes the centrality of history, community, and ethical representation in Mistry's fiction. The novel's famous "fine balance" is not passive moderation. It names the unstable work of preserving dignity between hope and despair. The ending refuses redemptive compensation, but Ishvar and Om's humor survives their mutilation. Laughter

does not neutralize injustice; it prevents the regime from entirely determining the meaning of their lives.

4.2 Such a Long Journey

Such a Long Journey narrows its initial focus to Gustad Noble, a Parsi bank clerk in Bombay, but gradually reveals how geopolitical conflict and clandestine state operations penetrate domestic life. The novel is set against the 1971 war and the political scandal associated with the Nagarwala affair. Gustad's trust in Major Bilimoria draws him into an illicit transfer of funds, collapsing the distinction between loyal citizenship and manipulation. The ordinary citizen becomes useful to the state precisely because patriotism can be exploited.

The Parsi community's minority position complicates national belonging. Gustad experiences nostalgia, insecurity, and resentment as the city changes around him. Mistry neither idealizes minority life nor assimilates it into a simple narrative of victimhood. Domestic conflicts, generational disagreement, illness, and communal memory coexist with public corruption. This density is politically important: minority identity is not an abstract category but a lived negotiation between attachment and estrangement. Gopal (2009) observes that postcolonial Indian fiction frequently treats the nation as an uneven and contested field rather than a completed community.

The black wall beside Gustad's housing compound becomes a key symbol. Initially used as a public urinal and later transformed by a pavement artist into a sacred mural, it demonstrates how urban space can be reclaimed through collective imagination. When municipal power destroys the wall during road widening, improvement discourse again authorizes erasure. The artist's paintings cannot permanently stop the machinery, yet they alter the wall's social meaning and gather a temporary public around it. Art functions here as local rebellion: vulnerable, syncretic, and capable of interrupting administrative definitions of space.

Mistry's tonal balance prevents political critique from becoming schematic. Comedy, Parsi idiom, ritual, friendship, and family argument coexist with betrayal and death. Gustad's movement is not toward revolutionary consciousness in a conventional sense. It is toward a more chastened understanding of vulnerability and interdependence. His journey reveals that dissent can begin with the refusal of political innocence—the recognition that distant wars, secret accounts, municipal plans, and neighborhood prejudices already inhabit everyday life.

5. Manohar Malgonkar: Nationalism, Violence, and the Crisis of Transition

5.1 A Bend in the Ganges

A Bend in the Ganges spans civil disobedience, revolutionary nationalism, imprisonment in the Andamans, the Second World War, and Partition. Its wide historical canvas allows Malgonkar to test competing political ethics. Gian Talwar is associated with Gandhian nonviolence, while Debi-dayal embraces revolutionary action. Their trajectories undermine stable labels. A professed pacifist can commit violence under pressure, while the revolutionary's courage may coexist with absolutism. The novel's central political problem is therefore not whether rebellion is necessary, but what violence does to the moral identity of those who employ or reject it.



Colonial rule appears through surveillance, imprisonment, racial hierarchy, and the strategic use of Indian intermediaries. The Andaman penal colony condenses imperial authority: bodies are isolated, classified, disciplined, and forced into compromised alliances. Yet the Second World War disrupts the apparent permanence of British power. Japanese occupation exposes the vulnerability of empire without offering uncomplicated liberation. One coercive order can replace another, reminding the reader that the enemy of an oppressor is not automatically emancipatory.

Partition transforms anticolonial struggle into communal catastrophe. Malgonkar traces how political identities harden into mutually exclusive religious categories and how slogans of unity fail before fear, revenge, and opportunism. The nationalist promise of collective freedom is shadowed by displacement and murder. Benedict Anderson's concept of the nation as an imagined community helps clarify this tension: national belonging depends upon shared narratives, but narratives can define the community by expelling those marked as alien (Anderson, 2006).

Malgonkar's historical realism differs from Rushdie's later metafictional exuberance, yet both distrust seamless national history. In *A Bend in the Ganges*, individual reversals expose the limits of ideological certainty. Gian and Debi are not allegorical solutions; they are ethically compromised agents whose choices are remade by circumstance. Rebellion acquires meaning only when judged by its treatment of human life. The novel honors anticolonial courage while refusing to sanctify political violence, especially when its logic migrates from resistance to communal revenge.

5.2 The Princes

The Princes examines the decline of princely India through Abhayraj, heir to Begwad, and his father, the Maharaja. Political oppression here is embedded in feudal sovereignty, hereditary privilege, colonial alliance, and the paternal language through which rulers imagine subjects as dependants. The princely order presents hierarchy as tradition and benevolence, but its stability rests upon unequal access to land, authority, and representation. British paramountcy both limits and preserves this order, creating a structure in which imperial and indigenous elites sustain one another.

Abhayraj's education and exposure to modern political ideas produce divided consciousness. He inherits privilege while recognizing that history is withdrawing its legitimacy. His predicament illustrates Bhabha's (1994) account of colonial ambivalence: the colonized elite may internalize imperial institutions and values while seeking national autonomy. The prince cannot return innocently to tradition, yet neither can he fully escape the material and emotional investments of his class.

The integration of princely states after Independence appears as a necessary democratizing transition, but Malgonkar resists a triumphalist account. Political modernization brings moral urgency, bureaucratic pressure, and personal loss. The novel asks whether elite adaptation constitutes genuine transformation or merely a transfer of power. Social rebellion is less



visibly mass-based than in A Bend in the Ganges, yet the delegitimation of inherited rule is itself a broad historical revolt against political inequality.

The narrative's critical value lies in its insider perspective. By entering the psychology of a ruling family, Malgonkar shows how oppressive systems reproduce themselves through affection, duty, ritual, and self-deception rather than naked cruelty alone. This does not excuse privilege; it explains its durability. The novel also complicates the category of "the people." Subjects may experience loyalty, dependence, resentment, and aspiration simultaneously. Democracy must therefore create more than constitutional transfer: it must alter the social imagination that makes domination appear natural.

6. Salman Rushdie: Nation, Dictatorship, and Metafictional Revolt

6.1 Midnight's Children

Midnight's Children binds Saleem Sinai's body to the history of independent India. Born at the moment of national independence, Saleem claims a privileged intimacy with public events, but his narration is unstable, self-correcting, excessive, and openly shaped by memory. This unreliability is politically productive. It refuses the authority of a single official chronology and presents the nation as a field of competing stories. Hutcheon's (1988) concept of historiographic metafiction clarifies the novel's double movement: it invokes historical events while exposing the narrative procedures through which history becomes intelligible.

The Midnight's Children Conference imagines a radically plural democracy. Children differentiated by region, religion, language, class, and supernatural ability are connected without becoming identical. Saleem's telepathy offers a model of communication, but his desire to manage the conference also reveals the authoritarian temptation within representation. The narrator who claims to speak for diversity may centralize it around himself. Rushdie's rebellion is therefore self-critical: pluralism requires not only many voices but also limits on the mediator's power.

The Emergency provides the novel's most direct convergence of body and state. The "Widow" and her agents sterilize the midnight children, destroying their reproductive and imaginative potential. Political authority seeks to erase alternative futures by controlling bodies and memory. The grotesque intensification does not trivialize historical coercion; it renders the ideological fantasy of total control visible. Jameson (1986) famously linked third-world texts and national allegory, but Rushdie's novel both invites and unsettles such reading. Saleem is connected to the nation, yet neither his body nor India can be reduced to a single allegorical code.

Rushdie's language is itself rebellious. English is crowded by Indian idioms, oral rhythms, cinematic references, gossip, food, and multilingual punning. Such hybridity challenges the assumption that legitimate history requires a pure or neutral language. Brennan (1989) reads Rushdie's fiction within the contradictions of cosmopolitanism and nationalism. Midnight's Children turns those contradictions into form: it is simultaneously intimate and panoramic,



celebratory and accusatory, archival and fabulist. Its cracks are not defects to be repaired; they are evidence that national history exceeds every container.

6.2 Shame

Shame shifts the focus to a fictionalized Pakistan while insisting that its country is “not quite” Pakistan. This ironic distance protects the novel from documentary literalism and enables a grotesque political fable about military dictatorship, populist charisma, patriarchy, and censorship. The careers of Raza Hyder and Iskander Harappa evoke recognizable political histories, but Rushdie transforms leaders into unstable figures within a narrative of rumor and exaggeration. Dictatorship depends upon heroic myth; satire rebels by making the hero ridiculous, excessive, and narratively porous.

The novel’s governing affect is shame, a social emotion unevenly imposed upon women. Sufiya Zinobia absorbs the humiliations and violent contradictions that her family and political culture cannot acknowledge. Her monstrous transformation literalizes the return of repressed rage. Yet this symbolism raises an ethical difficulty: female suffering risks becoming the vehicle for a national allegory narrated through male political conflict. Spivak’s (1988) question about subaltern speech is relevant here. Sufiya’s body communicates, but her agency remains mediated by a narrator who repeatedly draws attention to his own storytelling power.

Shame and shamelessness support political domination in complementary ways. Patriarchal culture disciplines women through honor, while rulers display a shameless capacity to rewrite events. Censorship attempts to stabilize this rewriting, but the narrator interrupts himself, addresses the reader, mixes worlds, and exposes omissions. The novel’s form performs what authoritarian discourse cannot tolerate: contradiction without final resolution.

Rebellion in *Shame* is destructive as well as liberating. Sufiya’s violence answers repression but cannot establish a just political community. Coups replace governments without dismantling the culture of domination. Fanon’s warning about the capture of national liberation by new elites resonates strongly (Fanon, 1963). Rushdie’s bleak comedy suggests that removing a ruler is insufficient when militarism, misogyny, dynastic politics, and public myth remain intact. Narrative revolt can disclose these repetitions even when the fictional world cannot escape them.

7. Comparative Analysis: Structures of Political Oppression

7.1 State Violence and Administrative Euphemism

Across the corpus, the state rarely names its violence honestly. Sterilization becomes family planning, demolition becomes beautification, occupation becomes security, princely absorption becomes administrative necessity, and censorship becomes national protection. Such euphemism converts political choice into technical procedure. Foucault’s (1977) emphasis on administrative knowledge helps explain why documents, categories, and institutional routines matter so greatly. The novels restore bodies to sanitized language: Ishvar and Om’s mutilation, Velutha’s crushed body, Kashmir’s disappeared, and the sterilized midnight children expose the human content hidden by policy.

7.2 Colonial Continuities

Malgonkar depicts colonial prisons and alliances directly, while the later writers reveal how colonial technologies survive within postcolonial sovereignty. Police procedure, emergency legislation, military occupation, bureaucratic suspicion, and elite distance persist after the flag changes. Said (1993) argues that imperial culture shapes categories of knowledge as well as territorial rule. The novels show postcolonial institutions inheriting both. This continuity does not mean independence is meaningless; it means freedom remains incomplete when authority preserves the colonial distinction between governable populations and disposable ones.

7.3 Hegemony, Consent, and Political Spectacle

Oppression also requires participation. Party workers, family elders, religious majorities, landlords, minor officials, and frightened neighbors reproduce domination. Gramsci's (1971) hegemony is visible in the conversion of hierarchy into common sense. Baby Kochamma's accusation works because caste prejudice makes it believable; Emergency rallies simulate popular consent; princely ritual represents dependence as loyalty; and Rushdie's regimes manufacture charisma through spectacle. By distributing responsibility, the novels prevent the reader from locating evil only in exceptional tyrants.

7.4 Unequal Citizenship

The protagonists occupy sharply unequal relations to citizenship. Parsis fear numerical and cultural decline; Dalits encounter inherited exclusion; Muslims face communal suspicion; Kashmiris live under militarized scrutiny; hijras are denied normative personhood; women are regulated through family honor; and refugees or slum residents are treated as obstacles to development. The nation proclaims abstract equality while allocating exposure to violence unequally. The counter-archive of fiction records this gap between constitutional promise and lived belonging.

8. Narrative Form as Political Resistance

The political force of the selected fiction cannot be separated from its forms. Mistry's realism makes oppression cumulative. Repetition, coincidence, and dense social detail demonstrate how vulnerability is produced across institutions. Critics sometimes view the extremity of suffering in *A Fine Balance* as excessive, but the accumulation has a structural purpose: it denies the liberal comfort that each disaster is isolated. The characters' fragile household creates a counter-rhythm of care within that accumulation.

Malgonkar's historical realism works differently. His wide plots place characters at ideological crossroads and allow political conviction to be tested by war, prison, communal conflict, and institutional transition. The narrative does not simply endorse Gandhian or revolutionary positions. It dramatizes reversals that expose the instability of moral identity under historical pressure. The result is a critique of heroic simplification.

Rushdie makes narrative unreliability and hybridity explicit. Saleem's errors, the narrator's intrusions in *Shame*, magical transformations, and anachronistic play reveal history as constructed without claiming that all versions are equally just. This distinction is essential. Metafiction does not abolish truth; it contests monopoly over truth. The authoritarian state



insists upon one coherent story, while Rushdie produces forms capable of holding contradiction, plurality, and correction.

Roy's lyrical fragmentation aligns ethics with attention. In *The God of Small Things*, child perception breaks adult political language into sensuous fragments. In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, polyphony and documentary collage resist the hierarchy of a single central life. Roy's excess of names and stories answers social systems that reduce people to category. Her narrative offers no detached neutrality; it is openly aligned with the excluded, yet it preserves internal disagreement and damaged agency.

All four writers therefore create counter-histories, but they do not do so identically. Realism can document; satire can desacralize; magical realism can expose the fantastic claims of power; fragmentation can represent traumatic memory; and polyphony can model democratic coexistence. Form becomes rebellion when it changes who may count as a historical subject and how readers are asked to distribute attention.

9. Discussion

Political fiction faces a persistent ethical risk: suffering can become spectacle, and marginalized characters can become instruments of an author's argument. The selected novels respond unevenly but self-consciously. Mistry grants extensive ordinary life to characters before catastrophe, making their losses irreducible to policy examples. Roy surrounds victims with desire, humor, anger, and eccentricity. Rushdie foregrounds the mediator's unreliability, while Malgonkar emphasizes ideological contradiction. These strategies resist simplification, although they cannot eliminate the unequal relation between author, narrator, character, and reader.

Spivak's (1988) caution remains important. Literary visibility does not guarantee unmediated subaltern speech. Velutha is central but rarely possesses narrative authority equal to the social forces interpreting him. Sufiya's body bears meanings supplied by others. Kashmir's dead enter an ambitious national narrative authored from particular locations of privilege. Ethical reading should neither dismiss these representations nor celebrate them uncritically. It should ask how mediation is acknowledged, whose interiority is developed, and whether the narrative invites the reader to consume pain or to confront structures producing it.

The corpus also challenges easy optimism about rebellion. Resistance may fail materially, become violent, or be absorbed into new hierarchy. Yet failure does not erase its ethical content. Ammu and Velutha's relationship cannot abolish caste, but it reveals caste's dependence on enforced separation. Jannat cannot end militarization, but it sustains people denied ordinary belonging. *The Midnight's Children* Conference collapses, but it imagines a plural political form against majoritarian unity. These temporary formations preserve possibilities that official history declares impossible.

A final tension concerns the relation between nation and democracy. The novels do not simply reject national belonging. They expose the struggle over its definition. Anderson (2006) shows that nations are imagined, not imaginary in the sense of unreal. The political question is who participates in the imagining. The selected fiction democratizes national

memory by admitting minor, stigmatized, defeated, and contradictory lives. Its rebellion is directed against the closure of the nation, not necessarily against every form of collective attachment.

10. Conclusion

Narratives of resistance in the selected fiction do not provide a reassuring progression from oppression to liberation. Malgonkar's historical novels show anticolonial struggle shadowed by ideological conflict, elite continuity, and Partition. Mistry demonstrates how democratic institutions can become machinery for the slow destruction of the poor while ordinary solidarity offers a vulnerable counterforce. Rushdie attacks authoritarian certainty through unstable narrators, grotesque satire, hybridity, and the multiplication of historical versions. Roy connects caste, gender, religion, occupation, and development, while imagining communities formed among those whom the nation refuses to count. The most significant common feature is the transformation of private injury into public history. A forbidden relationship, a destroyed wall, a sterilized body, a graveyard home, a prince's divided loyalty, or a narrator's cracked memory becomes evidence about the distribution of power. The novels ask readers to perceive politics not only in parliaments, wars, and leaders but in rooms, workplaces, checkpoints, family commands, jokes, and silences. Such attention prevents national history from becoming the exclusive property of victors. At the same time, the writers refuse to make the oppressed morally simple. Their resistant figures can be compromised, violent, fearful, self-interested, or mistaken. This complexity strengthens rather than weakens the political argument because equality requires the right to full human contradiction. The counter-archive does not replace one perfect official story with another. It creates an unfinished space where competing memories can confront one another.

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